

## Post Event Summary Report

<i>Name of Event:</i>	“Community Connections: Moving Seniors Toward Wellness” Forum
<i>Date of Event:</i>	September 1, 2005
<i>Location of Event:</i>	Omni Richmond Hotel, Richmond, Virginia
<i>Number of Persons Attending:</i>	100
<i>Sponsoring Organization:</i>	Meals On Wheels Association of America
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### Priority Issue #1:

Develop a fully integrated continuum of care in which at-risk older adults are routinely or systematically informed of or referred to local senior nutrition programs upon hospital discharge. These programs provide important services that have the potential to keep older adults active and healthy for a longer time. Without a comprehensive change in the way the current system operates, only incremental change can be achieved and this at-risk, older adult population will continue to go largely unserved. The results will be diminished quality of life for individuals and significant financial costs for both private and public payers, particularly as the baby boomers age.

#### Barriers:

- Lack of effective communication between the social service system (such as senior nutrition programs and nutrition-based services) and the health care system (hospitals, physicians’ offices, long-term care facilities, etc.)
- Lack of adequate resources for social service programs that serve older adults.
- Lack of awareness among health care professionals about the importance of nutrition to health status or the many ways that such nutrition can be provided to recently discharged patients.
- Lack of incentive on the part of physicians and other medical professionals to include nutrition-related services in patient care plans upon discharge.

#### Proposed Solutions:

- Acknowledge nutrition and nutrition-related services as a core element of long-term care and fund such services appropriately through Medicare and private insurance programs.
- Promote education efforts to inform health care professionals, the private sector and lawmakers about the importance of nutrition to health status.
- Create incentives that encourage health professionals and others working with older adults to provide education about the availability of community-based nutrition and related services.

- Establish referral systems in hospitals and other health care facilities that will ensure older adults are well informed about their options for nutrition and other wellness services after their discharge.

### **Priority Issue #2:**

Provide improved communications to educate the healthcare community, the private sector and lawmakers about the advantages of home and community-based care and wellness services as compared with the provision of institutionally-based care.

#### **Barriers:**

- Social services are not considered part of the health care continuum. As a result of this lack of integration, older adults do not receive all the care for which they are eligible.
- Lawmakers and medical professionals are not aware of the long-term benefits these types of social services provide to seniors. Better quality of life, independence and the ability to remain at home for as long as possible are not only benefits to older adults but to taxpayers and the Medicare system as well.

#### **Proposed Solutions:**

- Acknowledge nutrition and nutrition-related services as a core element of long-term care.
- Promote educational efforts to inform health care professionals, the private sector and lawmakers about the importance of nutrition to health status.

### **Priority Issue #3:**

Develop and improve programs that provide nutritious meals and other wellness services for older adults in order to increase the ability of the programs to provide these benefits in a timely manner. These programs, in partnership with the private sector and supported by the government, have the potential to improve the overall health status of older adults significantly.

#### **Barriers:**

- Many programs that provide home-delivered meals and other services are under funded, which leads to waiting lists. Delays in service may lead to malnutrition and greatly decrease the effectiveness of in-home nutrition programs.
- Public programs, private programs and corporations have not yet built a system that enables them to work in cooperation and partnership to accomplish these goals.

#### **Proposed Solutions:**

- Acknowledge nutrition and nutrition-related services as a partner in providing care to older adults and fund such services appropriately through Medicare and private insurance programs.

- Provide incentives that encourage the private sector to contribute food and other necessary goods to community-based nutrition and social service programs.
- Foster public-private partnerships that enable more efficient delivery systems using both financial and public relations oriented incentives.

**Nutrition and Wellness and the Integration of the Social Services and  
Health Care Systems**  
**Resolution Presented by the Meals On Wheels Association of America  
to the 2005 White House Conference on Aging**

**Overview of Current Issue Status and Policy:** Forty percent of all hospital discharges are older adults (12.7 million in 2002), and although the average length of stay has decreased over the past 30 years, the rate of hospitalization of older adults has increased. As the older adult population grows, this can be expected to increase. A significant number of these older adults are re-hospitalized each year; and a major cause of re-hospitalization is malnutrition and dehydration. While it is widely accepted that proper nutrition is critical to ensuring good health and wellness, senior nutrition programs are not fully integrated into the existing health care system. Older adults being discharged from the hospital are not routinely or systematically informed about or referred to local senior nutrition programs for services. Such programs can furnish discharged patients not only with critical nutrition services but also assist in connecting them with a broad array of community-based prevention and wellness services. In order to take advantage of community-based senior nutrition programs' ability to promote prevention and prevent disease as well as to improve overall wellness, federal and state decision makers should consider adopting policies that support a strengthened and restructured continuum of care that integrates nutrition, wellness and health care services.

**Challenges and Opportunities:** Although the social services and healthcare systems have long existed side-by-side within their communities and served the same individuals, they have not provided seamless care. In fact, in many cases, older adults receiving services within one system fail to access needed services for which they are eligible in the other. The result often is premature or unnecessary institutionalization, loss of independence, and a deterioration of health status. The challenge is to restructure the disparate systems into a single, integrated continuum of care. The transformed system would operate in an efficient and cost-effective manner that would produce cost-savings for all payers, including Medicare. At the same time, it would enhance the numbers and types of nutrition, health and wellness services available to the older adults.

**Resolution:**

Support programs and policies that identify and eliminate regulatory and systemic barriers in the existing health and social services delivery system that prevent older adults from gaining access to comprehensive community-based services.

Encourage hospitals and other health care institutions to develop referral systems that will ensure older adults have information about and access to nutrition and other wellness services immediately following discharge from the hospital or other institution.

Promote educational efforts to inform the health care professionals about the importance of nutrition to health status, to encourage them to educate patients about the availability of community-based nutrition and related services.

Encourage or provide incentives for medical professionals to include nutrition related services in patients' plans of care, where appropriate, and to facilitate referral to nutrition programs.

Acknowledge nutrition and nutrition-related services as a core element of long-term care.

Provide tax and other incentives to promote private sector contributions of food and other items to community-based nutrition and social service programs.

Encourage the enhancement of public-private partnerships in developing more efficient service delivery systems.